

THE LIFE OF ABDULLAH IBN AL-MUBARAK

THE SCHOLAR OF THE EAST AND THE SCHOLAR OF THE WEST

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COMPILED BY
FARHIA YAHYA

Based on the book, 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak, al-Imam al-Qudwah
By Muhammad 'Uthman Jamal

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“I looked to the Sahabah and I looked to ‘Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak, but I didn’t see a virtue for them over him, except in their companionship of the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) and their battles with him.”

- Sufyan ibn ‘Uyaynah (rahimahullah)

Contents -

Chapter	Page no.
➤ Introduction	5
➤ 'Abdullah Ibn al-Mubarak: His Birth and Background	6
➤ Ibn al-Mubarak, The Student of Knowledge	8
➤ Ibn al-Mubarak, The Merchant	13
➤ Ibn al-Mubarak, The Muhaddith	17
➤ Ibn al-Mubarak, The Faqeeh	25
➤ Ibn al-Mubarak Vs. The Misguided Sects of his Time	29
➤ Ibn al-Mubarak, The Mujahid	32
➤ Ibn al-Mubarak, The Poet	35
➤ Ibn al-Mubarak, The Pious Worshipper	39
➤ 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak: His Departure from this World	45

Introduction -

The pages of our Islamic history and heritage are filled with the lives of men and women whose influence on our history can only be retold by history itself. They served as beacons of light, illuminating the path set by this Ummah's Messenger (sallallaahu `alayhi wa sallam), and yet they were the heroes who protected this very path. Their interests didn't lie in worldly gain nor were their efforts for selfish reasons but they worked hard in sincerity and under burden to deliver this message of Islam to you and I. They strove day and night purifying their societies and correcting what had become corrupt in this Ummah. They were true *'ubbaad* (slaves) of Allah who had put the Hereafter before their eyes and hence worked only towards this one goal.

Their nights were not the same as ours, nor are our days comparable to theirs – and it wouldn't be far-fetched to say that a lifetime of ours could not equal a number of their days in virtue and achievement. For they were a people who valued time, knew how to live fully and work hard in ease and under pressure, in poverty and in health. They knew no bounds when it came to aiding the religion of Allah and they refused to acknowledge any limits to their efforts and struggles. They were the Companions, the *Tabi'in* (successors), the *Atba' al-Tabi'in* (successors of the *Tabi'in*), they were the righteous of this Ummah in the past and they are to be the righteous of those to come.

From amongst such figures are those who excelled in certain fields be they in leadership, scholarship, political thought, arts of war, business and literature to name but a few. You could say that one was a leading figure in such-and-such field; another would be an Imam on a different platform. However, rarely has history in the post-Prophethood era witnessed personalities who had gathered all these characteristics and succeeded across numerous fields and avenues. Rarely has it witnessed lives that were so enriched and yet enriching, so influential and inspiring, so powerful and empowering, so humble and yet so humbling.

One of these rarities lies in the very being of that scholar from *Khurasan*, the *Mujahid* between the army ranks, the *faqeeh* (jurist) and *muhaddith* (narrator) of his time, the righteous *'aabid* (worshipper) of his Lord, the successful merchant across cities, the well-known *zahid* (ascetic), the poet and writer, the grammarian and linguist, the respected and the leader of the Pious – **'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak**.

But who was 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak? Who is he about whom Isma'il ibn 'Ayyash, the scholar of al-Sham said, *"There is none like 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak on the face of this earth, nor do I know of a single good characteristic created by Allah except that He has put it in 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak."*

Let us delve into learning more about the life of this man whose input into Islamic Scholarship and history still benefits not just the masses today, but even the heirs to Prophethood; the scholars themselves.

Farhia Yahya
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'Abdullah Ibn al-Mubarak: His Birth and Background -

Name: 'Abdullah b. al-Mubark b. Wadhih al-Handhali al-Tamimi ²

Birthplace: He was born in *Marw* one of the prime cities in *Khurasan* (nowadays in the surroundings of Afghanistan and Central Asia), in the year 118 AH ³. *Marw* has historically been a bustling city of 'ilm which produced many scholars such as *Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, *Sufyan al-Thawri* and *Ishaq ibn Rahaway*. It was in this same city that 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak was born and raised until he reached roughly the age of twenty whereupon he left and began his travels to seek knowledge ⁴.

His father, Mubarak was originally a Turk, belonging to a merchant from *Banu Handhala* as a slave⁵ but he was known to be righteous and frequently in seclusion, worshipping Allah. Historical documentations and sources such as *Shadharat al-Dhahab* and *Wafayat al-A'yan* mention an interesting account that took place whilst Mubarak was working for his master in the fields/plantations: After having worked in those fields and tended to the fruits and crops for many years, he was one day approached by his master who requested a sweet pomegranate. Mubarak went to the crops and brought back a pomegranate but as the master bit into it, he found it to be sour. He said, 'I request a sweet one and you bring me a sour one? Bring a sweet one!' So he went and brought another pomegranate which again turned out to be sour. He rebuked him harshly and ordered a sweet one again. This happened for a third time whereupon the master said, 'Do you not know the difference between sweet and sour?' Mubarak said, 'No.' He said, 'How is that possible?' He said, 'Because I have never eaten from it such that I should know the difference.' His master said, 'And why have you not eaten of it?' He said, 'Because you have never given me permission to eat it.'

This was the piety his father had that prevented him from eating the fruits which he had long tended to and cared for throughout the years that he worked in those fields – he wasn't given permission to eat and so he refrained, out of obedience and fear of Allah `azza wa jall. His master, upon seeing the righteousness of Mubarak requested him to marry his daughter but he replied, 'The people in the time of ignorance used to marry for lineage, the Jews married for wealth and the Christians for beauty but this Ummah marries for Deen (religion).'

2 Tadhkirat al-Huffadh by al-Dhahabi, Tahdhib al-Asma wal-Lughat by al-Nawawi. Most sources only trace his name back to the tribe (Turki) whom his father belonged to as a slave.

3 Tahdhib al-Tahdhib by Ibn al-Hajr al-'Asqalani (5/386), Tabaqat Ibn Sa'd. There is a slight disagreement over his actual date of birth but most sources give it as 118AH. Ibn al-Mubarak himself said when asked about his year of birth, 'The 'ajm (non-Arabs) do not memorise these things but I remember I wore black whilst I was still young when Abu Muslim emerged' - Siyar. This was at the beginning of the 'Abbasi empire when the government took the colour black as their motto and made everyone wear it (the empire itself was established 132AH)

4 Tahdhib al-Tahdhib

5 Tarikh Baghdad by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, Siyar A'lam al-Nubala' by al-Dhahabi

He became even more amazed at the attitude of Mubarak whereupon he informed his wife who said, 'I do not see anyone else more suitable to marry her than Mubarak.' He *rahimahullah* then married his master's daughter (originally from *Khuwarizm*) who later gave birth to 'Abdullah⁶.

'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak was thus raised and brought up in a household known for its righteousness and nurtured by parents who were known for their piety, justice and humbleness.

'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak first received education in one of the many *kuttab* (local schools where children were taught to read and write). As a young child and student, Ibn al-Mubarak began to display intellect and powerful memory. One of his friends narrates an incident which took place whilst they were students in the *kuttab*. He says, 'We were young boys at school when Ibn al-Mubarak and I passed by a man giving a *khutbah* (sermon). He gave a long *khutbah*, and when we dispersed, Ibn al-Mubarak said to me 'I memorised it.' A man overhead him and said, 'Then bring it forth.' So Ibn al-Mubarak repeated all of it to him, and indeed he had memorised it.'⁷

Another incident which took place between him and his father additionally shows his intense love for study and excellence of recollection. His interest in reading hence occupied him from his duties in helping his father in trade. Nu'aym ibn Hammad narrates: 'I heard Ibn al-Mubarak say: 'My father said to me, 'If I find your books, I will burn them all.' I said, 'And what harm will that do me when it is all in my heart? (i.e. he memorised it)'⁸

According to the sources, Ibn al-Mubarak first travelled out of *Marw*, in order to seek knowledge in the year 141 AH⁹, which would mean that he began his *Talab al-'ilm* (seeking knowledge) at the age of 23. There is not much mention of what happened in his earlier youth although some sources¹⁰ say that he was cut off from education and studies and instead became influenced by youth culture and took to wasteful pastimes. This however may have been a short-lived stage in his life as he said, (when stating his reasons for leaving *Marw* and settling in *Kufa*): 'I would be in *Marw* and there wouldn't be an issue except that the people would come to me, or there wouldn't be a *mas'ala* (matter) except that they'd say 'Ask Ibn al-Mubarak!' And now I'm here, safe from all that'¹¹. Overall however, very little is known about the time period between his childhood and the time he left his city to seek knowledge.

6 Wafayat al-A'yan by Ibn Khallikan, Shadharat al-Dhahab by Ibn al-'Imad

7 Tarikh Baghdad

8 Tarikh Baghdad

9 Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, Tarikh Baghdad

10 For example, 'al-Fawa'id al-Bahiyyah, by Imam al-Lucknowi, Tartib al-Madarik by al-Qadi 'Iyad

11 Sifat al-Safwah, by Ibn al-Jawzi

Ibn al-Mubarak, the Student of Knowledge

Ibn al-Mubarak's excellent display of memory and skill in his youth only allowed him to excel further when it came to attaining and retaining knowledge. He was an ardent seeker of knowledge, travelling far and wide to reach scholars and lands known for their rich scholastic heritage. Ibn Abi Hatim said, 'I heard my father say, 'Ibn al-Mubarak covered a quarter of the earth by travelling in search of Hadith. He left out neither Yemen nor Egypt, neither al-Sham (greater Syria) nor the Peninsula, neither Basra nor Kufa.' ¹² Imam al-Dhahabi describes him as being 'Al-Saffar' (one known for his repetitive and extensive trips) and 'a companion of vast and remote journeys.' ¹³

It is narrated that Zakariyya ibn 'Adi said, 'I saw Ibn al-Mubarak in a dream and so I said 'What has your Lord done with you?' He said, '*He has forgiven me due to my journeys in search of Hadith.*' ¹⁴

Imam Ahmad also paid Ibn al-Mubarak an honorary testimony when he said: 'There was no-one at the time of Ibn al-Mubarak who sought knowledge more than he did. He travelled to Yemen, Egypt, al-Sham, Basra and Kufa. He was from the narrators of knowledge and he was well-deserving of that; he wrote from the young and old, he wrote from 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Mahdi and he wrote from al-Fizari... he has indeed gathered a great matter.' ¹⁵

Not only did Ibn al-Mubarak make efforts to leave home and seek 'ilm, but he also strove to make sure that what he did collect of narrations and statements was authentic. One interesting incident which shows this exertion of his is when he departed Marw and travelled all the way to the city of Ray (a distance of 1000km approx.) in order to hear and record the statement of al-Hasan al-Basri narrated by Harun ibn al-Mughirah: '*Do not purchase the love of a thousand men with the anger of one man.*' Harun said, 'Ibn al-Mubarak came to me while on the saddle of his camel/horse and asked me about this narration so I narrated it to him. Then he said, '*I have not saddled or prepared (my camel/horse) from Marw except for the sake of this narration.*' ¹⁶ This in turn begs the question: If this was his effort in seeking, collecting and authenticating a narration from a scholar such as al-Hasan al-Basri (rahimahullah), what then of his efforts when it came to the Prophetic narrations of the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam)? This exertion of his in authenticating reports is what awarded him to be one of those narrators whom Imam al-Bukhari took narrations from for his Sahih. The people once rebuked him for travelling so much saying, 'Until when will you seek to hear knowledge?!' He replied, '*Until death.*' ¹⁷

12 Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil, by Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi

13 Tadhkirat al-Huffadh

14 Al-Rihlah fi Talab al-Hadith, by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi

15 Tadhkirat al-Huffadh

16 Al-Rihlah fi Talab al-Hadith

17 Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah, by Ibn al-Qayyim

A special talent of Ibn al-Mubarak was his ability to write; he wrote many narrations and primarily preserved all that he heard in books of his. Wherever he travelled, he recorded down statements and narrations (with their authentic chains) from scholars and every trustworthy individual who possessed knowledge. In fact, it is said that the number of scholars whom he studied under reached up-to four thousand, a quarter of whom he narrated narrations from. He says, '*I took knowledge from four thousand scholars and I narrated from a thousand of them.*'¹⁸

However, Ibn al-Mubarak didn't restrict himself to recording statements from scholars only. Rather he would take whatever came to him if he found it to be of benefit, regardless of whether it came from the general masses, from those younger than him, or even from those upon a religion other than his! Al-Munawi mentions an account of when Ibn al-Mubarak's son died, a *Majoosi* (Zoroastrian) came to pay his condolences saying, 'The intelligent one must do today what the ignorant one will do after a week has passed (i.e. be patient).' Ibn al-Mubarak said to those around him, '*Write this down!*'¹⁹ – He saw the statement to be of some benefit and truth and so he didn't allow it to pass him by.

The people would question him saying, 'How much do you intend to write?!' And he would respond, '*Perhaps it is a word of benefit which I have not written down before.*'²⁰

Imam al-Dhahabi mentions in his *Siyar* that Abu Salih al-Farraa' said: 'I asked Ibn al-Mubarak about the writing down of knowledge (in books) and he said, '*Were it not for books, we would never have been able to memorise.*'

He's also reported to have said, '*The stain of ink on clothes is the trademark of scholars.*'²¹ In other words, it becomes a sign of scholarship when ink stains one's clothing due to the concern of that person in writing down knowledge and authoring books.

Imam Ahmad narrates this love of Ibn al-Mubarak. He said, 'Ibn al-Mubarak used to narrate from books, and whoever narrates from books will hardly have many errors. Wakee' used to narrate from his memory and he would therefore have errors. And how much can a man commit to memory anyway?'²²

His talent of writing down knowledge benefited him greatly as he then had recourse to these books of his. Al-Sindi ibn Abi Harun said, 'I used to go with Ibn al-Mubarak to the scholars and I once said to him (when we didn't find a scholar), 'O Abu 'Abdur-Rahman! Now who are we going to benefit from?' He said, '*From our books.*'²³

18 Tadhkirat al-Huffadh

19 Faydh al-Qadir, *by al-Munawi*

20 Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

21 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'

22 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'

23 Hilyat al-Awliya'

As a student of knowledge, Ibn al-Mubarak paid high regard to his teachers and those who were his seniors. He was once asked about an issue in the presence of Sufyan Ibn 'Uyaynah and so he said, *'We have been prohibited from speaking in the presence of our seniors!'* ²⁴

One of his teachers, 'Isa ibn Yunus said, 'Ibn al-Mubarak and I were once in the land of the Romans and due to the excessive service Ibn al-Mubarak paid me, I became shy – he would hold onto my riding animal and when we settled, he'd bring the Khabis dish to me (dish made of dates and fat) and feed me mouthfuls, all the while asking me about Hadith and in turn writing them down. So I said to him, 'O Shaykh (because of his goodness towards me)... is it not time that you tired of this?' He said to me, *'And who can grow tired of this (i.e. knowledge)?'* ²⁵

Creativity when seeking knowledge was not something lost to Ibn al-Mubarak. As seen from the above incident, he employed various ways of getting scholars and his teachers to speak on certain matters in Fiqh, Hadith etc. Once he said, 'I was with Muhammad ibn Nadhr al-Harithi on a ship when I said to myself, 'How can I get him to speak?' So I said to him, *'What do you say about fasting during travel?'* He said to me, 'It is indeed a difficult undertaking O cousin...' *'And so by Allah, he gave me a fatwa that was different to the fatwa of Ibrahim and al-Sha'bi.'* ²⁶ – This showed his eagerness in benefiting from a scholar; and he didn't ask a simple question but rather one which required broad explanation in both the field of fasting and travel – all this whilst sailing on a ship!

Nu'aym ibn Hammad: 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak used to stay in his house a lot so it was said to him, 'don't you feel lonely?' He said, *'How can I feel lonely when I am with the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) and his Companions?'* In another narration, he said, *'Am I on my own?! No, rather I am with the Prophets, the Righteous, the Wise ones; the Prophet and his Companions!'* Then he began to recite the following lines of poetry:

ولي جلساء ما أمل حديثهم *** ألباء مأمونون غيباً ومشهداً
I have companions whose speech I never tire of
Intelligent ones, trustworthy in absence and in presence

إذا ما اجتمعنا كان حسن حديثهم *** معيناً على دفع الهموم مؤيداً
When we gather together then their good speech
Helps me ward off all worries and concerns

يفيدونني من علمهم علم ما مضى *** وعقلاً وتأديباً ورأياً مسدداً
They benefit me with their knowledge of what has passed by
Of wisdom, intelligence, discipline and correct opinion

²⁴ Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'

²⁵ Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

²⁶ Al-'Aqd al-Farid, by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih

بلا رقية أخشى ولا سوء عشرة *** ولا أتقى منهم لسانا ولا يدا
*I fear neither cruelty nor evil companionship
 Nor do I fear from them a ruthless tongue or hand*

فإذا قلت: أحياء فلست بكاذب *** وإن قلت: أموات فلست مفنداً
*If you were to say, 'They are alive' then you have not told a lie
 And were you to say, 'They are dead' then you are not wrong.*

He is reported to have said, 'A person does not stop being knowledgeable so long as he seeks knowledge. The moment he thinks that he is knowledgeable, he becomes ignorant.'²⁷

His efforts in seeking knowledge reached such heights that his name became known amongst the scholars of Hadith. It is said that he went to Hammad ibn Zayd (the Muhaddith) for the first time and Hammad looked to him, amazed. He said, 'Where are you from?' He said, 'From the people of Khurasan.' He said, 'What part of Khurasan?' He said, 'From Marw.' He said, 'Do you know a man called 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak?' He said, 'Yes.' Hammad then asked, 'What's he doing?' Ibn al-Mubarak said, 'He's the one you are currently talking to.' So Hammad greeted him and welcomed him much.'²⁸

One of the intriguing things to note about Ibn al-Mubarak's search for knowledge was that he sought it in every field, topic and subject. His knowledge as a result spanned into numerous areas such that his contemporaries and those after him like al-'Ijli bore witness that he had "assembled all of knowledge"²⁹ in terms of scholarship.

Al-'Abbas ibn Mus'ab said, "Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak gathered up knowledge of Hadith, Fiqh, the Arabic Language, history, he had bravery, did business, had generosity and love when leaving people.'³⁰

Abu Dawud al-Tayalisi comments: 'I have not seen anyone gather knowledge as much as 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak, for indeed he was a Muhaddith, Faqeeh (jurist), orator and a poet with eloquence. Every learned person used to seek him out and they would find with him knowledge that they could not find elsewhere.'³¹

His companions and students used to speak about these vast qualities of Ibn al-Mubarak and discuss the extents that they reached. One day they said to each other, 'List the good qualities of Ibn al-Mubarak.'

27 Ihya 'Ulum al-Din, by Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali

28 Tarikh Baghdad

29 See above source

30 See above source

31 Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

So they mentioned that he '... gathered knowledge, knew fiqh, literature, grammar, sciences of the Arabic language, asceticism, bravery, poetry and eloquence of speech, piety and abstinence, the night prayer and worship, pilgrimage, participation in battles and the arts of war, abandoning what did not concern him of speech, accuracy in forming opinions and differing as little as possible with his companions.'³²

Each of these qualities possessed by Ibn al-Mubarak deserves its own chapter, but it shall suffice us to take a few and expand on them here insha'Allah.

³² Tarikh Baghdad

Ibn al-Mubarak, the Merchant

'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak did not only excel in the field of knowledge and scholarship, but he was also a very successful businessman. He would travel through cities and make profit in multi-folds such that he became financially strong and this only aided him further in seeking knowledge and travelling to various lands. It is said that he learnt business and trade primarily from his father who was established in the field (as he was owned by a merchant), and he also used to learn the art of trade from Abu Hanifah (who was one of his teachers) just as much as he used to learn from him Islamic knowledge ³³.

Ibn al-Mubarak didn't see trade and business except as a way to ease his *talab al-'ilm*, and give him financial stability as well as independency from people. He (rahimahullah) traded across various lands and moved between cities until he became a well-known merchant with tremendous income. Without doubt, the fact that he was a successful businessman was one of the main things that aided his ability to travel for knowledge.

Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi mentions in his *Tarikh Baghdad* that 'Ali ibn al-Fudhayl narrates: 'I heard my father say to Ibn al-Mubarak, 'You command us to be ascetic, content with little and spend on others but we see that you come with possessions (goods), so how is that?' He said, 'O Abu 'Ali, I only do that to protect my face, honour myself (i.e. independency from others) and I use it to aid me in the obedience of my Lord.' He said, 'O Ibn al-Mubarak, and what can be better than that when it's fulfilled?' ³⁴

And for sure, Ibn al-Mubarak did use all his income in order to protect his honour as it is well-known that he would refuse to accept handouts and monetary gifts from the rulers and governors. On top of that, he would spend on others more than he spent on himself.

It is reported that every year he would spend a hundred thousand *dirhams* on the poor and needy ³⁵. He would also annually fund and sponsor his students and others to make Hajj (Pilgrimage). Al-Khatib reports in his *Tarikh* from Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn al-Hasan Shaqiq: 'I heard my father say, 'When the time for Hajj came, the companions of Ibn al-Mubarak from Marw would gather around him and say 'Let us accompany you.' He would then say, 'Bring your finances' and he'd take it and put it in a box, locking it safely. Then he'd go out with them from Marw to Baghdad and he would not cease spending on them and giving them the best of foods and sweet dishes. Then they'd leave Baghdad with the best of clothes and appearances until they'd reach the City of the Prophet (sallallaahu `alayhi wa sallam) where he'd say to each one of them, 'What have your children asked that you purchase for them from the beauties of Madinah?' They would say such-and-such thing (and he's purchase it for them, one by one). Then they'd leave for Makkah, and when they'd fulfil their duties he'd say to each one of them, 'What have your children asked that you purchase for them from the delights of Makkah?' They would say such-and-such thing, and he would buy it for them.

³³ Shadharat al-Dhahab

³⁴ Tarikh Baghdad

³⁵ Tarikh Baghdad

They would then leave Makkah and he never stopped spending on them until they reached Marw where he would decorate their homes and doors. After three days, he would hold a feast for them and clothe them until they ate and became delighted, then he would call for the box (which contained their wealth). He would then open it and give back every man his wealth, each with his name on it.' ³⁶

Allah `azza wa jall had indeed blessed the wealth and business of Ibn al-Mubarak, and he in turn was a grateful slave to his Lord. It is said that his capital reached about four hundred thousand dirhams ³⁷.

Ibn al-Mubarak would also help his friends with their finance and warned them from falling into debt and problems, thereby becoming humiliated and lowly amongst the people. Al-Musayyib ibn Wadhih said, 'Ibn al-Mubarak sent four thousand dirhams to Abu Bakr ibn 'Ayyash saying to him, *'Use this to divert from yourself the fitnah of your people.'* ³⁸. He, rahimahullah, saw debt and dependency on others to be a form of *fitnah* (trial), and hence he actively used his own wealth to help his brethren and companions. He is reported to have said to Fudhayl ibn 'Iyyadh, *'Were it not for you and your companions, I would not have done business.'* ³⁹ – i.e. he stayed in trade and business just so he can spend on others!

'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak did not however limit his *infaq* (spending on others) to just his companions and those whom he knew. His generosity expanded and became widespread such that strangers would approach him and ask him to relieve them of debts that they had. Ibn al-Mubarak allocated a *wakeel* (trustee) over his finances who would see to these requests and on permission would settle people's debts out of the wealth of Ibn al-Mubarak. Salamah ibn Sulayman narrates: 'A man came to Ibn al-Mubarak and asked him to settle his debt. So he wrote to a trustee of his and when the letter had reached the trustee, he asked the man *'How much is the debt for which you've asked to be settled?'* He said, *'Seven hundred dirhams.'* However 'Abdullah (Ibn al-Mubarak) had written that he should be given seven thousand dirhams so the trustee wrote back to him and said, *'The revenue (income) is coming to an end!'* 'Abdullah wrote back in response, *'If the income is coming to an end then life is also coming to an end. Give him what my pen has written by accident.'* ⁴⁰

Because of his generosity and towards others - particularly the students of knowledge - the people residing in his homeland began to rebuke him for it. Hibban ibn Musa said, 'When Ibn al-Mubarak was criticised for spending money outside of his city, he said, *'Indeed, I know the rank of those who possess virtue and genuineness. They sought knowledge of Hadith and they did so well due to the need of the people towards that (knowledge). So if we abandon them, their knowledge will be lost and if we aid them, they spread the knowledge to the Ummah of Muhammad (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam). I do not know of anything after Prophethood more virtuous than knowledge.'*

³⁶ Tarikh Baghdad

³⁷ Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

³⁸ and ³⁹ See above source

⁴⁰ Tarikh Baghdad

It is also reported from Muhammad ibn 'Isa that he said: 'Ibn al-Mubarak used to frequently go to Tarasus and settle in a small inn. There was a young man who would visit him often and assist him with his needs and also listen to hadith from him. One time 'Abdullah (Ibn al-Mubarak) travelled there but he did not see him. He had to leave quickly with a group of people but when he returned he asked about the young man. They said he was jailed for not paying a debt of 10,000 dirhams.

He asked to be shown the creditor, and (when they did) he paid out the 10,000 and took an oath from him (the creditor) that he would not inform anyone as long as he was alive. So he released the young man and departed by night. The young man then came to see Ibn al-Mubarak twice in the inn and he said, '*O young man! Where were you? I have not seen you!*' He said, '*O Abu Abdur-Rahman, I was jailed for debt.*' He said, '*How was it settled then?*' He said, '*A man came and settled the debt but I do not know him.*' He said, '*Then praise Allah.*' And the young man did not know about this until Ibn al-Mubarak had passed away.⁴¹

In 'Tartib al-Madarik' Qadhi 'Iyad mentions a particular incident concerning Ibn al-Mubarak as he was making his way to Hajj (pilgrimage). He reports that 'Abdullah entered Kufa and saw a young woman plucking a dead duck. Since it is impermissible to consume dead meat, he asked her if it was sacrificed. She replied that it was not. '*Then why are you plucking it?*' He said. She replied, 'So that my family and I can eat it.' He informed her that it was not permissible to do so, and so she said, 'Go away.' In a narration mentioned by Ibn Kathir, she said, 'My brother and I have only one piece of clothing. We have no food except what we find thrown in the dumps. Carrion has become permissible for us to consume for a number of days now (due to severe poverty). Our father was a rich man but his wealth was taken from him oppressively and he was killed.'

He asked regarding her family's whereabouts and she informed him. He hired a man to take him there and when he found the house, he released his riding animal and gave it to the household along with all the goods that were on it. In Ibn Kathir's narration, it mentions that he handed over most of the money he had to the young woman (money that was provision for his Hajj), keeping only what was sufficient for his journey back to his land, Marw. He gave his provisions away to the impoverished family saying, '*This is better for us than our (supererogatory) Hajj this year.*'

When his companions returned from Hajj, they came to congratulate him on fulfilling his Hajj too. He said, '*I did not go this year...*' One of them said, 'Subhan'Allah! Did I not leave my possessions with you whilst we were at Mina and on our way to 'Arafat?' Another one said, 'Likewise, didn't you buy things for me?' He turned to them saying, '*I do not know what you are saying. As for myself, I did not go on hajj this year.*' Later that night, he had a dream wherein a voice called out to him saying, 'Rejoice O' Abdullah! Allah has accepted your act of charity and He sent an angel in your form to carry out the Hajj on your behalf.'⁴²

⁴¹ Tarikh Baghdad

⁴² Tartib al-Madarik, by Qadi 'Iyad. See also Al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah by Ibn Kathir

Another incident which further highlights his dislike of taking anything from the Ruling *Hukkam* or even those who associated with them, is told to us by al-Hasan ibn al-Rabi'. He said, 'When Ibn al-Mubarak returned from a journey, he said '*I desire a sawiq dish* (a dish made of wheat/barley with sugar or dates).' However we didn't find it except with a man who used to work for the Ruler, and who was with us on the ship (in the journey). We mentioned this to 'Abdullah and he said, '*Leave it.*' – And he died without ever having tasted the dish.'⁴³ – This was perhaps his only opportunity to have the dish but due to the honour he had and his dislike of going to those associated with the Ruler, he forwent the opportunity and abandoned it till he died.

⁴³ Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

Ibn al-Mubarak, the Muhaddith

'Abdullah ibn Idris said, 'We have nothing to do with any hadith that is not known to Ibn al-Mubarak.' ⁴⁴

Ibn al-Mubarak was a muhaddith (a scholar in Hadith) to whom many of the scholars and those in authority paid tribute to. He was esteemed by both peers and elders and he was recognised and respected for his scholarship in this field. The scholars of *Jarh* and *Ta'dil* (critique of the narrators) are unanimous in their approval of him as a strong, reliable and trustworthy muhaddith. He is also one of the narrators of Imam al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* collection, and it is well known the strict and firm guidelines that Imam al-Bukhari adopted when it came to the particulars of narrators and their reliability in Hadith. Yahya ibn Ma'in (scholar in Jarh and Ta'dil) said, 'He (Ibn al-Mubarak) was intelligent and accurate (in narrating reports). He was trustworthy and knowledgeable of the Sahih narrations.' ⁴⁵ He also described Ibn al-Mubarak as being 'a leader from the leaders of the Muslims.' In the *Siyar*, it relates that his narrations are *hujjah* (point of proof) by consensus. He is included in both the *Masanid* (book of Hadiths recorded by chain of narrators) and in the *Usul*.⁴⁶ This is all in addition to the fact he himself was a scholar of Jarh and Ta'dil who spent his lifetime sifting through the narrations of the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) and distinguishing between the *Sahih* (authentic) and *Dha'if* (weak), separating the reliable narrators from the not-so. He was once asked: 'What about the fabricated reports?!' To which he replied, '*The intelligent, critical and knowledgeable scholars live for their sake.*' – In other words, they live in order to seek these fabrications out and remove them, thus safeguarding the Sunnah of Rasulullah (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam).

His status as a Hadith narrator reached such heights that anyone who was seen to cast doubts on him was immediately ruled off. Aswad ibn Salim said, 'Ibn al-Mubarak was an Imam who was followed. He was the foremost in having knowledge of the Sunnah. If you see a man disparaging Ibn al-Mubarak, then accuse him of (defect in) his Islam!' ⁴⁶

'Abdur-Rahman al-Mahdi, a teacher of Ibn al-Mubarak and a renowned muhaddith said, 'The Imams (muhaddithin of his time) are four: Sufyan al-Thawri, Malik ibn Anas, Hammad ibn Zayd and Ibn al-Mubarak.' He then used to say, 'Ibn al-Mubarak was more knowledgeable than Sufyan al-Thawri' – this was despite al-Thawri being the teacher of Ibn al-Mubarak! The fact that he was younger did not remove from his authority in Hadith, for it is related that both the young and old would come to learn from him and narrate hadith from him. Abu Ishaq al-Fazari used to sit in front of Ibn al-Mubarak and ask him (learning etc) despite the fact that he was older than him by twenty years ⁴⁷, for knowledge knows no age boundary and it is the case that Allah `azza wa jall gives this 'ilm to whoever He pleases and takes it away from whoever He wishes.

⁴⁴ Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

⁴⁵ Tahdhib al-Tahdhib

⁴⁶ Tarikh Baghdad

⁴⁷ Tarikh Baghdad, Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

It has historically been the case that youth have sprung out to take this Ummah and lead it to prosperity, victory and goodness. Indeed, Islam was made victorious at the hands of youth from the Sahabah who sacrificed their all to spread the Message of *La ilaha illa Allah*. So those who recognise the fact that the blessings of Allah (ilm, authority, righteousness etc) can be given to one younger than they, will not be hesitant in humbling themselves for such a person – and this was the case for those who studied and narrated from Ibn al-Mubarak.

It was the same Sufyan who praised Ibn al-Mubarak and recognised his virtue when he heard Ibn Abi Jamil say: 'We were around Ibn al-Mubarak in Makkah and so we said to him 'O scholar of the East, narrate to us.' Sufyan who was in hearing distance said, 'Woe to you! Rather he is the scholar of the East and West and what is between them both!'⁴⁸

Tarikh Baghdad also recorded that once a man came to Sufyan al-Thawri asking him about certain masa'il (pertaining to Islamic Law), so he asked him:

'Where are you from?'

The man said, 'From the people of the East'

Sufyan: 'Is there not with you the most knowledgeable person of the East?'

He said, 'And who is that O' Abu Abdillah?'

Sufyan: 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak.'

The man said, 'Is he the most knowledgeable of those in the East?'

Sufyan: 'Yes, and the most knowledgeable of those in the West.'

Abu Usamah (Hammad ibn Usamah al-Kufi, one of prominent muhaddithin of Kufa) said, 'When counted amongst the people of Hadith, Ibn al-Mubarak is like the Amir al-Mu'minin (leader).'⁴⁹

Numerous are the reports testifying to Ibn al-Mubarak's authority in Hadith and many were those who respected Ibn al-Mubarak as an established muhaddith in the Islamic world in that era.

In the ranks of other muhaddithin of his time, Ibn al-Mubarak was often placed first due to the strength of his memory, accuracy in narrating the Prophetic traditions and due to the abundance of his knowledge in general. Ja'far ibn Abi 'Uthman al-Tayalisi said to Yahya ibn Ma'in:

'If there is a contradiction between Yahya al-Qattan and Waki' (who do we take from)?'

Ibn Ma'in said, 'The final word is with Yahya.'

Ja'far: 'And if 'Abdur-Rahman and Yahya differ?'

He said, 'That requires the presence of someone to judge between them.'

⁴⁸ *Tarikh Baghdad*

⁴⁹ See above source

Ja'far: 'What about Abu Nu'aym and 'Abdur-Rahman?'

He said, 'That requires someone to judge between them.'

Ja'far: 'What about al-Ashja'i?'

He said, 'Al-Ashja'i has died and his narrations have died along with him.'

Ja'far: 'What about Ibn al-Mubarak?'

Ibn Ma'in said, 'He is the Amir al-Mu'minin (leader of the faithful in Hadith).'

⁵⁰

The nickname 'Amir al-Mu'minin' was an honourable title that narrators and scholars of Hadith would give to another when they recognised the magnitude of virtue and 'ilm in a muhaddith.

Al-Nadhr ibn Musawir once asked Ibn al-Mubarak, 'O Abu 'Abdur-Rahman, do you memorise narrations (with total accuracy)?' The face of 'Abdullah changed colour and he said, '*I have never memorised a hadith (i.e. with pre-intention and difficulty therein). Indeed, I only take a book and read it, and whatever I desire from there clings to my heart.*'⁵¹ – And this is something that alludes to not only his strong memory but also his attachment to the Prophetic narrations; whatever affected him and moved his heart was immediately memorised by him without too much difficulty.

One demonstrative incident took place when Ibn al-Mubarak went to visit and greet Hammad ibn Zayd whilst he was with his students. When he came, the students asked him (Hammad): 'O Abu Isma'il, ask Abu Abdur-Rahman to narrate to us.' So he said, 'O Abu Abdur-Rahman, will you narrate to them for they have asked me.' Ibn al-Mubarak said, '*Subhan'Allah! O Abu Isma'il, shall I narrate to them whilst you are present?!*' He said, 'I swear to you to do it.' So Ibn al-Mubarak said, '*Here, take (these narrations): Abu Isma'il Hammad ibn Zayd narrated to us that...*' – and he went on to narrate a full set of ahadith all from Hammad ibn Zayd, on the spot from his memory.⁵²

What is interesting to note (as previously alluded to) is that despite his strength in memory, Ibn al-Mubarak's methodology was to narrate from his books and not merely from memory – and this was out of respect for the Sacred narrations of Rasulullah (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam). It can also be said that this further increased his accuracy and helped attain perfection in his memorisation of narrations.

Due to this, he was a living source for many people and a resource that the people went back to for confirmation of ahadith. Yahya ibn Adam said, 'If I ever sought out the particulars of an issue and did not manage to find it in the books of Ibn al-Mubarak, I would give up on it.'⁵³ He was nicknamed 'The doctor' and whenever people differed in narrations of Hadith, they would refer back to him.

⁵⁰ Tarikh Baghdad

⁵¹ See above source

⁵² See above source

⁵³ See above source

This was something known to everyone of his period, including the Rulers although he always abstained from them at all times. It is reported that once a heretic was brought to Harun al-Rashid who subsequently ordered for his execution. The heretic said to him, 'Why are you executing me?' He said, 'To relieve the worshippers of you (and your heresy).' He said, 'And what can you do about the one thousand narrations that I attributed to the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) although he did not utter a single letter of them?' Al-Rashid then said to him, 'O enemy of Allah! And what can do you about Abu Ishaq al-Fazari and Ibn al-Mubarak who will sift through them and extract them one by one!' ⁵⁴ - It is just as the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) said in an authentic narration, ***'This knowledge will be carried in every generation by its trustworthy ones. They will remove from it the distortions of the excessive ones, the false claims of the liars and the wrong interpretations of the ignorant.'*** [al-Bayhaqi]

His accuracy and expertise in *Jarh al-Ta'dil* stemmed from his acquaintance with the *ruwat al-Hadith* (narrators) and this was furthered by his skill and knowledge of history, lineage and knowledge of tribes and societies. He would often be asked about the stronger students of certain muhaddithin - for example, when asked if Jarir was the strongest in narrating from al-Mughirah, he replied in the negative and said that Abu 'Awanah was (another student). Similar questions were put forth to him regarding other muhaddithin such as Ma'mar, and he at times gave weight to certain narrators (e.g. al-Zuhri) for what he saw of their accuracy and reliability in transmitting narrations.

As mentioned, he was qualified in the field of Jarh and Ta'dil and was familiar with the weaknesses that were present in narrators as they related from certain scholars. Yahya ibn Ma'in said, 'I heard Ibn al-Mubarak criticize 'Umar ibn Harun in the reports he heard from Ja'far ibn Muhammad' - and this was roughly a total of sixty narrations. It is reported that Ibn al-Mubarak said, *'The narrations of Jarir ibn 'Abd al-Hamid from al-Sirri ibn Isma'il are not to be written down.'* Another time he would say, *'Throw away the narrations of Muhammad ibn Salim.'* - And this was all due to his knowledge of these narrators, their weaknesses and the defects of those particular reports.

One time, a hadith narrated by Habib ibn Khalid al-Maliki was mentioned to him and he said, *'It is nothing* (i.e. not reliable).*'* It was said to him, 'But he is a righteous Shaykh!' He said, *'Yes, he is righteous in everything except in this narration.'*

Ibrahim ibn 'Isa al-Taliqani said: 'I said to Ibn al-Mubarak, 'Can one pray on behalf of another or can one fast on behalf of another?' He said, *'With regards to charity there is no ikhtilaf* (difference of opinion - i.e. charity can be performed on behalf of another, but not prayer or fasting).*'* I said, 'But what about the hadith reported from the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam): ***'Indeed from piety after piety is that you pray on their behalf along with your prayer and fast on their behalf along with your fast.'*** He said, *'The narration is from whom?'* I said, 'From Shihab ibn Kharash.' He said, *'He is reliable. Who did he narrate from?'* I said, 'From al-Hajjaj ibn Dinar.' He said, *'He is reliable. Who did he narrate from?'* I said, 'From the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam).'*'*

⁵⁴ Tadhkirat al-Huffadh

He said, 'O Abu Ishaq! Between al-Hajjaj and the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) is a distance wherein the necks of camels are severed!' (i.e. it's a long distance) ⁵⁵ – And this meant that Ibn al-Mubarak did not accept *Mursal* narrations (hadith in which the Sahabi link is missing such that a Tabi'i narrates from the Prophet).

His Teachers and Students

One of the consequences of Ibn al-Mubarak's vast and continuous travels was that he gained the companionship of many people. Some of those became his teachers whom he narrated from and some became his students who in turn narrated from him – and yet some of them both narrated to him and also narrated from him (hence at one point being a teacher and at another a student!).

It is reported that his teachers included Abu Hanifah, the two Hammads (Ibn Zayd and Ibn Salamah), Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah, Ibn Jurayh, Sufyan al-Thawri, Shu'bah, Al-A'mash, Yahya ibn Sa'id, Ibn Shurayh, al-Awza'i, Isma'il ibn 'Ayyash, Ibn Abi Dhi'b, Hisham ibn 'Urwah, al-Jariri, Sulayman al-Taymi, Malik ibn Anas, Layth ibn Sa'ad, Ma'mar (both Ma'mar ibn Rashid and Ma'mar Ibn Sulayman), Zakariyyah ibn Ishaq and many others.

Among those who narrated from him were the likes of Abu Ishaq al-Fazari, Ibn Wahb, 'Abdur-Rahman ibn Mahdi, Abu Dawud, Yahya al-Qattan, Yahya ibn Ma'in, Ibn Abi Shaybah (both Abu Bakr and his brother 'Uthman), al-Hasan ibn al-Rabi', al-Fudhayl ibn 'Iyadh, Yahya ibn Adam, Ishaq ibn Rahawayh as well as a number of his teachers such as Sufyan al-Thawri, Ma'mar, Ibn 'Ayyash and many more.

Ma'mar ibn Sulayman said, 'I was with Ibn al-Mubarak and he would narrate to me and I would also narrate to him' ⁵⁶ – hence they became teacher and student of each other. This was a striking phenomenon that occurred amongst muhaddithin who were contemporaries in that due to their knowledge and humbleness as well as their never-ending efforts in seeking knowledge, often times they would narrate from each other and end up in each other's chains of narrations.

In all, the number of scholars who he took from and those that took from him are too numerous to mention here. Imam al-Dhahabi said, 'A large number of people around the world narrated from him (Ibn al-Mubarak) such that they cannot be counted and this is because since he was young, he did not stop travelling.' ⁵⁷

55 Mizan al-I'tidal, by al-Dhahabi

56 Adab al-Imla' wa al-Istimla', by Ibn al-Sam'ani

57 Tadhkirat al-Huffadh

As a muhaddith who saw the sacredness of the Prophetic narrations, Ibn al-Mubarak didn't allowed this 'ilm or its 'ulama (scholars) to be faded by the fleeting glitter of this world and its gains. He often rebuked the scholars who were found at the doors of the Rulers as more often than not, they sold their religion and their knowledge for mere temporary gain, honour or praise. He would also see it to be unbecoming when a scholar accepted a position of authority from the Rulers as this could also lead to the scholar's downfall and demise in this world. One example of this is when it was said to Ibn al-Mubarak, that 'Isma'il ibn 'Aliya has been made a Judge.' So Ibn al-Mubarak wrote to him the following lines of poetry:

يا جاعل العلم له بازيا *** يصطاد أموال المساكين
O you who made his knowledge to be a falcon
With which he seizes the wealth of the poor!

احتلت للدنيا ولذاتها *** بحيلة تذهب بالدين
You have taken on the world and its delights
With a scheme that does away with religion!

فصرت مجنوناً بها بعدما *** كنت دواء للمجانين
And so you have become a mad one
After having being a cure for the mad ones

أين رواياتك في سردها *** عن ابن عون وابن سيرين
Where are your recorded narrations
From Ibn 'Awn and Ibn Sireen?

أين رواياتك فيما مضى *** في ترك أبواب السلاطين
Where are your narrations in the past
About abandoning the doors of the Rulers?

إن قلت أكرهت فما هكذا *** زل حمار الشيخ في الطين
If you say that you've been forced (into judgment)
Then that's not how the donkey of a scholar slips into mud ⁵⁸

His efforts in Hadith were plentiful and in abundance such that he did not cease narrating regardless of where he was. If he travelled, he would narrate and if he took residence he would still narrate. Even if he was in situations where narrating ahadith was difficult, he would still do it. Ibn Abi al-Khayr wrote a particular hadith in his book along with the following Isnad: 'Al-Walid ibn Muslim narrated from Ibn al-Mubarak who narrated from Khalid ibn al-Hidha from 'Ikrimah from Ibn 'Abbas that he said, 'The Messenger of Allah (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) said, **'Blessings are with your elders.'**⁵⁹ I said to al-Walid, 'Where did you hear Ibn al-Mubarak narrate this?' He said, 'In Battle.'⁶⁰ – and this just proved that his efforts in knowledge lasted even through battles.

58 Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyah al-Kubra by al-Subki, also recorded in the Siyar with slightly different wording

59 Hadith reported by Abu Nu'aym, al-Hakim and Ibn Hibban. Declared Sahih by al-Dhahabi

60 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

Nawfal said, 'I saw Ibn al-Mubarak in my dream and so I said to him, 'What did Allah do with you?' He said, 'He has forgiven me due to my journeys in search of Hadith. Upon you is to adhere to the Qur'an, upon you is to adhere to the Qur'an.' ⁶¹

Isma'il ibn Ibrahim al-Musaysi once saw al-Harith ibn 'Atiyyah in a dream and he asked him (about his state). He said, 'I have been forgiven.' He then said, 'And what about Ibn al-Mubarak?' He said, 'Bakh bakh! (an expression of surprise) He is in the 'Illiyeen (Book of records for the righteous) who come to Allah twice every day.' ⁶²

Abu Hatim al-Farbari said, 'I saw Ibn al-Mubarak (in my dream) standing at the door of Paradise with a key in his hand. I said, 'What made you stand here?' He said, 'This is the key to Paradise which I am to return to the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam). He (the Prophet) said, 'Until I visit the Lord, be my trustworthy one in the Heavens just like you were my trustworthy one on the earth.' ⁶³

And those who preserve the Prophetic traditions and narrations, who authenticate the statements of the Messenger, who verify what is really from the Sunnah and what is not... they are most certainly the trustworthy ones of the Messenger of Allah on earth.

Some examples of the Ahadith narrated by Ibn al-Mubarak (رواياته) and in which he is part of the chain of narrations (isnad):

'Two men sneezed in the presence of the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) and so the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) said 'May Allah have mercy on you' to one of them and he did not say it to the other, instead saying 'This one said Al-Hamdulillah and you did not say Al-Hamdulillah.' ⁶⁴

The Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) said, 'On the night of Ascension, I saw men tearing their tongues with scissors made of fire so I said, 'Who are these people O Jibril?' He said, 'These are the eloquent speakers from your nation who command the people with that they do not do themselves.' ⁶⁵

The Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) said, 'I have been ordered to fight the people until they bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, so if they do that and face our Qiblah (prayer focus), pray in our congregation and eat of our meat, then their blood and wealth is prohibited from us except by right (of Law). They have a right to what the Muslims have a right to and upon them is whatever is upon the Muslims.' ⁶⁶

61 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

62 See above source

63 See above source

64 Agreed upon narration

65 Reported by Ibn Abi Dunya, Ibn Hibban, al-Bayhaqi and al-Hakim

66 Reported by al-Bukhari

The Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) said, *'There are two blessings which most of Mankind loose out on: Good health and free time.'* ⁶⁷

The Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) said, *'The smart one is he who humbles his soul and works for what comes after death and the wrong-doer is he who lets his soul follow its desires and yet he hopes for Allah.'* ⁶⁸

The Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) said, *'I don't see how the seeker of Paradise can sleep, and I don't see how the one fleeing from Hellfire can sleep.'* ⁶⁹

The Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) said, *'Allah Ta'ala will say to the people of Paradise 'O people of Paradise!' and so they will say, 'Here we are, Our Lord at Your service.' He will say, 'Are you pleased?' They will say, 'How can we not be pleased when You have given us what You have not given to anyone else from Your creation?!' So He will say, 'I shall give you what is better than all that: I shall let My Pleasure descend upon you and I shall never be angry with you.'* ⁷⁰

Abu Hurayrah narrates: I heard the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) say, *'Seventy thousand people of my nation will enter Paradise, their faces shall be as bright as the moon on a full-lit night.'* Abu Hurayrah said, 'So 'Ukkashah al-Asadi stood up and said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Ask Allah to make me from amongst them.' He said, *'O Allah, make him one of them.'* A man from the Ansar stood up and said, 'Ask Allah to make me from amongst them.' So he said, *'Ukkashah has preceded you.'* ⁷¹

'Uqbah ibn 'Amir narrates that the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) went out and asked Allah's forgiveness for the martyrs of the battle of Uhud after eight years. It seemed that by so doing, he bid farewell to the living and the dead. He then said, *"I shall be your precursor; I am a witness for you, and I will be present before you at the River (Hawd Al-Kauthar). By Allah I can see the Hawd with my own eyes from this place. I am not afraid that you will associate anything with Allah in worship after me (my demise), but I fear that you will compete with one another for the life of the world.'* 'Uqbah said: It was the last time that I saw the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam). ⁷²

⁶⁷ Agreed upon

⁶⁸ Reported by Imam Ahmad

⁶⁹ Reported by al-Tirmidhi who classed it as weak, but al-Tabarani recorded another chain of this hadith which is classed Hasan (good)

⁷⁰ Agreed upon [al-Bukhari and Muslim]

⁷¹ Agreed upon

⁷² Agreed upon

Ibn al-Mubarak, the Faqeeh

Yahya ibn Yahya al-Laythi reports: 'We were with (Imam) Malik when permission was sought for Ibn al-Mubarak to enter, and he was granted it. Then we saw Malik shift the gathering and spread it out for him and then he sat him down firmly. I had never seen Malik spread his gathering out for anyone other than him. A recitor (or a student) was reading to Malik and perhaps it was the case that he passed by something (in the text) and so Malik asked him (Ibn al-Mubarak): 'What is your opinion/methodology with regards to this?' I saw Ibn al-Mubarak answer him and correspond with him, and then he stood up and left. Malik was left amazed at his etiquettes and manners and so he said to us, **'This is Ibn al-Mubarak, the Faqeeh of Khurasan.'**' ⁷³

On top of being a muhaddith, 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak was also a Faqeeh (i.e. a scholar in Fiqh). He was well acquainted with matters pertaining to Islamic Jurisprudence and possessed fine knowledge of intricate *masa'il* (issues in fiqh). Just as he was counted among the ranks of the Muhaddithin, he was also counted among the ranks of the Fuqaha' (Jurists).

Ibn Hajr al-'Asqalani: "Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak is trustworthy, reliable and a Faqeeh." ⁷⁴

Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah: 'He was a Faqeeh and a scholar.' ⁷⁵

Ibrahim ibn Shamas: 'I saw one who possessed the most understanding (fiqh), one who possessed the most piety and one who possessed the strongest memory. As for the one who possessed the most understanding, that was 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak. As for the one who was the most pious, then that was al-Fudhayl ibn 'Iyad and as for the one who had the strongest memory, then that was Waki' ibn al-Jarrah.' ⁷⁶

His understanding and knowledge of Fiqh was also manifest in his deeds and this is what distinguished him in the eyes of others. Ibn al-Jawzi mentions an interesting incident in Sifat al-Safwah which shows just how much his knowledge of Fiqh and Hadith was tied to his actions: Suwayd ibn Sa'id said, 'I saw 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak in Makkah as he went to the (water of) *Zamzam* to drink from it. Then he faced the *Ka'bah* and said,

'O Allah, Ibn al-Mawali narrated to us from Muhammad ibn al-Munkadir, from Jabir who narrated from the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) that he said, 'The water of Zamzam is for whatever it's drank for [Sahih Ibn Majah]' and here I am drinking it to prevent the thirst of the Day of Judgment.' Then he drank it.'

⁷³ Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

⁷⁴ Taqrib al-Tahdhib, by Ibn Hajr al-'Asqalani

⁷⁵ Tahdhib al-Tahdhib

⁷⁶ Tarikh Baghdad

As previously mentioned, some of the teachers whom Ibn al-Mubarak learnt from were also great Jurists, namely Abu Hanifah (founder of the Hanafi school of Fiqh), Imam Malik (founder of the Maliki school of Fiqh) and Sufyan al-Thawri (who established the Thawri school of Fiqh which died out quickly due to his exile and lack of students to narrate on his teachings and works).

About these teachers, Ibn al-Mubarak says, '*Were it not for the fact that Allah aided me with Abu Hanifah and Sufyan, I would have been like everyone else (i.e. a layman).*'⁷⁷

He also said, 'I used to sit with Sufyan al-Thawri and he would narrate. I said, '*I have heard everything he has of knowledge.*' But then I would sit with him in another gathering and when he narrated I said (realizing the depth of his knowledge), '*I have yet to hear of his knowledge!*'⁷⁸

He was once asked, 'Who are the leaders (Imams) of the people?' He said, '*Sufyan and those like him.*'⁷⁹

It is reported that he learnt the *Muwatta'* of Imam Malik and narrated it back to him. A strong and knowledgeable jurist, Imam al-Shafi'i said about Imam Malik: 'If the scholars are ever mentioned, Malik is the star.'⁸⁰

Once, Ibn al-Mubarak was in the presence of Malik who was narrating Hadith when a scorpion bit him sixteen times. His face changed colour but he bore patience and he did not halt the narrations. When he finished (narrating), Ibn al-Mubarak said, 'I asked him about this and he said, 'I was patient out of respect and honour for the Hadith of the Chosen one (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam).''⁸¹

Ibn al-Mubarak also had the honour of learning from Abu Hanifah, one of the greatest Fuqaha' in Islamic history and from its early scholars. Imam al-Shafi'i said about him, 'People in fiqh are like children when compared to Abu Hanifah.'⁸²

Ibn Hajr al-Haytami said, 'And many of the great Juristic Imams learnt from him (Abu Hanifah) as well as the well-grounded scholars such as the exalted Imam whose greatness, knowledge, advancement and asceticism is agreed upon: 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak.'⁸³

Ibn al-Mubarak himself said, '*I have not seen anyone in Fiqh like Abu Hanifah and I have not seen anyone speak in the matters of Fiqh as well as Abu Hanifah.*'⁸⁴

77 Qawa'id fi 'Ulum al-Hadith, by *Dhafir Ahmad al-'Uthmani al-Tahanawi*

78 Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

79 Hilyat al-Awliya

80 Tadhkirat al-Huffadh

81 Faydh al-Qadir

82 Tadhkirat al-Huffadh

83 Al-Khayrat al-Hisan fi Manaqib al-Imam al-A'dham Abi Hanifah al-Nu'man, by *Ibn Hajr al-Haytami*

84 Tahdhib al-Asma wa al-Lughat

He also said, 'I entered al-Kufa and asked about its scholars. I said, *'Who is the most knowledgeable person in this city of yours?'* And they all said, 'Abu Hanifah.' *I have not seen anyone with more piety than Abu Hanifah; he was beaten with whips and tested with wealth.'*

In one particular incident, Ibn al-Mubarak was in *al-Qadisiyyah* with some of his companions when a man came to him abusing Abu Hanifah. So Ibn al-Mubarak said to him, *'Woe to you! Do you abuse a man who prayed the five obligatory prayers for forty-five years with a single wudhu' (ablution), and who used to complete the Qur'an in two raka'at (of prayer) in a single night, and from whom I learnt all that is with me of Fiqh?'*⁸⁵

When Sufyan al-Thawri passed away, Ibn al-Mu'tamir ibn Sulayman asked his father, 'O father, who is the Faqeeh of the Arabs?' He said, 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak.'⁸⁶

As an established Jurist, he was loved and respected by both the scholars and the general populace. It was such that he was of the few that were not known to have any shortcomings in their field as Abu 'Umar said, 'I do not know of anyone from the Jurists who is free from blame except for 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak.'⁸⁷

He (Ibn al-Mubarak) once said, *'Whoever is miserly with knowledge will be afflicted with one of three things: Either death which takes away his knowledge, or he will forget, or he ends up being with the Rulers and so his knowledge leaves him.'*

He lived in a period that witnessed the scholarship of many Jurists such as Imam Malik, Abu Hanifah, Sufyan al-Thawri, Imam al-Awza'i and Layth ibn Sa'd to name but a few, and he was included amongst them whenever they were mentioned despite the fact that most were his teachers and seniors. He was seen to be a Faqeeh among these giants in Fiqh.

The books written by Ibn al-Mubarak

Ibn al-Mubarak authored many titles in a diverse number of fields such as Hadith, Fiqh, Tafsir, History, Poetry, Heart-softeners etc. Unfortunately, as is the case for many of the early scholars, almost all of the books authored by Ibn al-Mubarak are now either lost and untraceable or they lie scattered around the world hidden away in manuscripts. History mentions only the names of some of his works and a few references are made in the works of other scholars.

Some of the books that have been reported to have been written by Ibn al-Mubarak are as follows:

⁸⁵ Tarikh Baghdad

⁸⁶ Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil, see also Hilat al-Awliya

⁸⁷ Al-Jawahir al-Mudhiyyah fi Tabaqat al-Hanafiyyah, by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Qurashi

1. **Kitab al-Arba'een** – كتاب الأربعين (Hadith): Ibn al-Mubarak was the first to write a book collecting forty Prophetic narrations due to the hadith: *'Whoever preserves forty narrations for my nation in the matters of their religion, Allah will resurrect him on the Day of Judgement in the group of the Fuqaha (jurists) and 'Ulama (scholars).'* – It was due to this narration that many scholars after Ibn al-Mubarak began to gather their own collections of 'Forty Hadith' including al-Nasa'i, Imam al-Ajurri, al-Asfahani, al-Daraqutni, al-Hakim, Abu Nu'aym, Abu 'Abdir-Rahman al-Sullami, al-Bayhaqi and of course, the latter Imam whose celebrated forty Hadith became widespread and renowned – Imam al-Nawawi. This particular collection of Ibn al-Mubarak just like much of the *Arba'eeniyat* (forty narrations) of others has yet to be found.
2. **Kitab al-Jihad** – كتاب الجهاد: A profound book collecting over 260 Prophetic narrations, reports and statements from the Sahabah and Tabi'in concerning Jihad and the incidents of Jihad which they witnessed. It is said that Ibn al-Mubarak may well have been the first to collect and put together a complete book/collection on this topic. One of the few books of Ibn al-Mubarak which are currently around, *Kitab al-Jihad* was first published in 1971 in Beirut and recently republished by Dar al-Imam Ahmad in 2006.
3. **Kitab al-Isti'dhan** – كتاب الاستئذان
4. **Kitab al-Birr & al-Silah** – كتاب البر والصلة (Book on the virtues of piety, etiquettes and keeping ties)
5. **Kitab al-Tarikh** – كتاب التاريخ (Book on History)
6. **Kitab al-Daqa'iq fi al-Raqa'iq** – كتاب الرقائق في الرقائق (Book on the heart-softeners)
7. **Kitab Riqa' al-Fatawa** – كتاب رفاع الفتاوى (Book on Islamic verdicts)
8. **Kitab al-Zuhd & al-Raqa'iq** – كتاب الزهد والرقائق: A book on Islamic asceticism and heart-softeners, collecting narrations encouraging the remembrance of the Hereafter and encouraging detachment from this world and being affected by its false impressions. This book was first published in India (with tahqiq by Shaykh Habib al-Rahman al-Azami) and recently in Beirut.
9. **Kitab al-Sunan fil-Fiqh** – كتاب السنن في الفقه
10. **Kitab al-Musnad** – كتاب المسند
11. **Kitab Tafsir al-Qur'an** – كتاب تفسير القرآن

Ibn al-Mubarak vs. the Misguided Sects of his Time

Ibn al-Mubarak said, '*Make your places of gathering be with the poor and be cautious of sitting with the people of innovation.*'⁸⁸

In his time, Ibn al-Mubarak was one of those who staunchly opposed deviancy, heretical groups, views and methodologies. He lived to see the development of the *Mu'tazili*, *Qadariyyah* and *Jahmiyyah* beliefs⁸⁹ and subsequently warned people from following them or taking knowledge from them. As a muhaddith and Faqeeh, he made public his abandonment of those who supported and propagated deviancy.

He once recited:

أيها الطالب علما *** إيت حماد بن زيد
O Student of Knowledge!
Go to Hammad ibn Zaid

فخذ العلم بحلم *** ثم قيده بقيد
Seize knowledge with forbearance
Then tie it down with a chain

وذر البدعة من آثار عمرو بن عبيد
And abandon innovation from
The reports of 'Amr ibn Ubayd⁹⁰

'Amr ibn 'Ubayd (propagator and leader of the *Mu'tazilah* in his time) used to previously sit in the gatherings of al-Hasan al-Basri and was upon the belief of *Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah* until Wasil ibn 'Ata misguided him and he thus joined the *Mu'tazilah*. Nu'aym ibn Hammad asked Ibn al-Mubarak regarding 'Amr and the reason why he was abandoned by the scholars of hadith. He replied, '*Because 'Amr calls (to his corrupt view) on the Decree (Qadr).*'⁹¹

It should be noted that the scholars of hadith did not reject the narrations of everyone who ascribed to a certain group or belief, but only those who propagated it, commanded it and championed it. It was once said to Ibn al-Mubarak, 'Why do you narrate from Sa'id and Hisham al-Dustuwa'i but yet abandon the narrations of 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd although their beliefs are the same?' He said, '*Because 'Amr calls to his opinion whilst the other two are silent.*'⁹²

⁸⁸ Siyar A'lam al-Nubala, Hilyat al-Awliya

⁸⁹ Some of the deviant groups that arouse in the era of Ibn al-Mubarak. Their views included their belief that the Qur'an was a created entity, corrupt opinion regarding the Qadr of Allah and also their false understanding of the Names and Attributes of Allah.

⁹⁰ Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah

⁹¹ Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

⁹² Tarikh al-Islam, by al-Dhahabi

'Ubayd'Allah ibn Musa said, 'We were with Abu Hamza al-Thamali when Ibn al-Mubarak came (to learn/record narrations). Abu Hamza then mentioned a narration about 'Uthman (radhiallahu `anhu) wherein he belittled/abused him, so Ibn al-Mubarak stood up and tore apart everything he had written from him and then he left.' ⁹³

Ibn al-Mubarak along with others saw these groups as having left the fold of Islam due to their false statements regarding the Qur'an, the Qadr and the Names and Attributes of Allah. Ibn al-Mubarak said, 'I heard Sufyan al-Thawri say: *'The Jahmiyyah and the Qadariyyah are disbelievers.'* - 'Ammar ibn 'Abd al-Jabbar then asked him, 'And what is your opinion on them?' He said, 'My opinion is that of Sufyan's.' ⁹⁴

Ahmad ibn 'Abdillah ibn Yunus heard Ibn al-Mubarak reciting some Qur'an after which he said, 'Whoever claims that this is created has indeed disbelieved in Allah the Almighty' ⁹⁵ - and this was one of his many statements in refutation of those who supported the view that the Qur'an (and in effect, the Speech of Allah) was a created matter when in fact the Attributes of Allah `azza wa jall are of His Being and hence not created.

The name of Jahm (who was the head of the Jahmiyyah) was once mentioned in his presence and he began to recite:

عجبت لشيطان أتى الناس داعياً *** إلى الشر واتسق اسمه من جهنم
I am amazed at a devil (Jahm) who comes to the people
Calling them to evil when his name is derived from Jahannam! ⁹⁶

'Ali ibn al-Hasan Shaqiq asked Ibn al-Mubarak: 'How should we believe in our Lord?' He said, 'By believing that He is above the seven heavens over His Throne. We do not say what the Jahmiyyah say that He is here on earth!' ⁹⁷

A man once said to him, 'O Abu Abdir-Rahman! I fear Allah (for myself) because of how much I curse the Jahmiyyah.' He said, 'Do not fear, for they claim that your God Who is in the heavens is nothing.' ⁹⁸

In another incident, it was said to him: 'Shayban accuses you of being a Murji'ah.' He said, 'Shayban has lied for I oppose the Murji'ah in 3 matters: They claim that Iman (faith) is only in words and not deeds, but I say that it's in words and deeds. They claim that the one who abandons prayers is not a disbeliever but I say that he is a disbeliever. They claim that Iman does not increase or decrease and I say that it does increase and decrease.' ⁹⁹

93 Mizan al-I'tidal

94 Hilyat al-Awliya

95 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

96 See above source. The words جهنم (which means 'gloomy') and جهنم (hellfire) share a similar root in the Arabic language (i.e. the letters ج - ه - م)

97 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

98 See above source

99 Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra

Ibn al-Mubarak once said to someone out of his concern for this knowledge and its people, *'You should know my brother, that death is a blessing for every Muslim who meets Allah upon the Sunnah. Indeed, to Allah we belong and to Him we are returning! Only to Allah do we complain of our loneliness for indeed our brothers have gone, our supporters have decreased and innovation has appeared.'*¹⁰⁰

He held sincere to his beliefs and strived to follow the Sunnah as best as he could. As a result, his efforts against innovation and anything which misguided people away from the Sunnah of Muhammad (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) were strict and firm. It once reached him that al-Harith al-Muhasabi (author of Risalat al-Mustarshidin) ate some food with a known innovator, so Ibn al-Mubarak said to him, *'I am not going to speak to you for thirty days!'*¹⁰¹

As mentioned previously, he abandoned the narrations of those who were involved with deviancy, heresy and those who championed incorrect or false ideologies. He was also steadfast in his abandonment of whoever abused the Companions. 'Ali ibn al-Hasan Shaqiq said, *'I heard 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak say to everyone, 'Abandon the narrations of 'Amr ibn Thabit because he abuses the predecessors!'*¹⁰²

100 Al-I'tisam, by Imam al-Shatibi

101 Hilyat al-Awliya

102 Sahih Muslim

Ibn al-Mubarak, the Mujahid

Ibn al-Mubarak not only defended Islamic knowledge from being polluted by falsehood, heresy and deviancy, but he also defended Islam physically. He was a scholar known for partaking in battles and defending the Muslim lands. Ibn Kathir said in his '*Al-Bidayah*': 'He was known for participating in battles and Hajj very often.'¹⁰³

In *Tadhkirat al-Huffadh*, Imam al-Dhahabi called him '*the pride of the Mujahidin (fighters)*' and he comments: 'He was the leader of the brave... he used to perform Hajj one year and in the next year, he would be stationed in battles in the Way of Allah.'¹⁰⁴

He used to observe *Ribat* (guarding the army fronts) in Tarsus and al-Massisah (near the land of the Romans) as well as other places. He was particularly known for his Jihad against the Romans and just like he was an Imam in Islamic knowledge, he was also an Imam in warfare, and just as he taught Hadith and Fiqh, he also taught the people heroism and bravery. Hajj one year and Jihad the next was a principle he lived by and this was to such an extent that his death came just as he had returned from battle.

Ibn Abi Hatim mentions that when he went out to battle and *Ribat*, he would gather the *Mujahidin* and teach them Hadith. Upon arriving, the first thing the army did was surround Ibn al-Mubarak who would then teach them knowledge and Hadith which they in turn wrote down. They learnt knowledge from him just as they learnt the skills of war and bravery.¹⁰⁵

It is reported that when in *Tarsus*, Ibn al-Mubarak wrote a letter to his friend al-Fudayl ibn 'Iyadh (who was known for his worship in Makkah and Madinah), encouraging him to partake in Jihad and not to be satisfied with simply worshipping Allah in the mosques. Ibn Abi Sukaynah said, 'In Tarsus in the year 177 AH, Ibn al-Mubarak gave me a letter with the following verses. I bid farewell to him and went to deliver it to al-Fudhayl ibn 'Iyadh:

يا عابد الحرمين لو ابصرتنا *** لعلمت انك في العبادة تلعب

O Worshipper of the two Holy Mosques!

Were you to see us, you would realise your worship is mere play

من كان يخضب خده بدموعه *** فنحورنا بدمائنا تتخضب

For the one whose tears fall down his cheek (in worship)

Then in turn, our blood flows down our necks (in battles)

¹⁰³ Al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah

¹⁰⁴ Al-'Ibar fi Akhbar man Ghabar, by al-Dhahabi

¹⁰⁵ Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

أو كان يتعب خيله في باطل *** فخيولنا يوم الصبيحة تتعب
*Or him whose horse tires in pursuing pretence
 Then our horses toil on the morning of combat*

ريح العبير لكم ونحن عبيرنا *** رهج السنايك والغبار الأطيب
*For you is the smell of fragrance, but our fragrance
 Is the dust and dirt kicked off, which is more pleasant*

ولقد اتانا من مقال نبينا *** قول صحيح صادق لا يكذب
*And indeed, the words of our Prophet have reached us
 A correct and truthful statement, which cannot be denied*

لا يستوي غبار خيل الله في *** أنف امرئ ودخان نار تلهب
*The dust stirred up by the Horse of Allah which enters a man's nose
 Can never coexist with the smoke of a blazing fire (Hell) ¹⁰⁶*

هذا كتاب الله يحكم بيننا *** ليس الشهيد بميت لا يكذب
*This is the Book of Allah which shall judge between us
 Surely, the martyr is not dead and this can never be refuted*

Ibn Abi Sukaynah said, 'So I met al-Fudhayl in the *Haram* (Makkah) with the letter and when he read it, tears came to his eyes and he said, 'Indeed, Abu Abdur-Rahman (Ibn al-Mubarak) has told the truth and he has certainly advised (me).'¹⁰⁷

His words matched his actions for he was not one to keep back from engaging in the actual battle. Not only did he hold his post as a *Murabit* (guard), he also plunged into the heat of battle when the occasion called for it. Ibn Muthanna narrates that 'Abdullah ibn Sinan said, 'I was with Ibn al-Mubarak and Mu'tamir ibn Sulayman in *Tarsus* when the call to arms was made. So Ibn al-Mubarak came out along with the people. When the two ranks faced each other, a Roman emerged and requested a duel (one-on-one fight until death). So a man went out to him but the infidel overpowered him and killed him. He kept doing that until he killed six of the Muslims whereupon he began to boast and walk with pride in between the two ranks. He requested a duel but no-one went out to him. So Ibn al-Mubarak turned to me and said, 'If I am killed, do such and such for me.' And then he moved his horse and went out to the dueller. He fought him for a while and then killed him. He (Ibn al-Mubarak) requested another duel and so another infidel came out to him and he killed him too until he had killed six of the Romans. He requested a duel but it seemed like they all feared him!

¹⁰⁶ Ibn al-Mubarak here alludes to the Hadith reported by al-Nasa'i: 'The dust (stirred up) in the Way of Allah and the Fire of Jahannam will never come together in the chest of a slave.'

¹⁰⁷ *Al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa al-Qahira*, by Tughri Burdi, also recorded in *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala* (8/413) and other collections.

So he struck his horse and went between the two ranks, then he hid. We didn't see anything when suddenly, he reappeared next to me exactly where he previously was and he said to me, 'O 'Abdullah, if you ever mention this to anyone whilst I am alive...' – and he made a (stern/clear) statement after that. ¹⁰⁸

And thus with humbleness did he struggle and fight. He was known to partake heavily in battles but when it came to the spoils being distributed after the battle ceased, he would be found missing! In *Dhayl Jawahir al-Mudiyyah*, it is mentioned that someone once asked him about this (disappearing at the time of spoil-exchange), and he simply replied, '*The One for Whose Sake I fight, knows who I am.*'

He led his life in this way, defending the Muslim lands until he died. The son of al-Fudhayl said, 'I saw Ibn al-Mubarak in my sleep and so I said to him, 'What have you found to be the best of deeds?' He said, '*That which we used to engage in.*' I said, 'Do you mean Jihad and Ribat?' He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'What did your Lord do with you?' He said, '*He forgave me with a Forgiveness that requires no forgiveness after it.*' ¹⁰⁹

108 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

109 See above source

Ibn al-Mubarak, the Poet

In addition to his many talents, achievements and abilities, 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak was also gifted in literacy, particularly in the art of poetry. He held an eloquent tongue which was recognized by all who conversed with him and his language displayed the nature of someone who had been taught well.

Most of the poetry which has been recorded from him is actually his advice to others, whether they were close friends or high-ranking Caliphs and Rulers. The topics spoken of concerned the common issues which had arisen in his time (e.g. matters pertaining to theology, politics, the worldview, the community etc) and as always, they contained much wisdom and hence the books of history have sealed them and recorded them.

Here are a few of his poetic expressions:

On his advice with regards to dealing with others, friendship and companionship:

أرى رجالا بدون الدين قد قنعوا *** ولا أراهم رضوا في العيش بالدون
فاستغن بالله عن دنيا الملوك كما *** استغنى الملوك بدنياهم عن الدين

*I see men who are content without religion
But I do not see them being content in life
So be rich with Allah from the world and its kings
Just like the kings feel rich with their world from religion ¹¹⁰*

وإذا صاحبت فاصحب صاحبا *** ذا حياء وعفاف وكرم
قائلا للشيء لا إن قلت لا *** وإذا قلت نعم قال نعم

*If you accompany another, then do accompany
A friend who is bashful, humble and generous
Who says 'No' when you say 'No'
And says 'Yes' when you say 'Yes' ¹¹¹*

إذا رافقت في الأسفار قوما *** فكُن لهم كذي الرحم الشفيق
يعيب النفس ذا بصر وسلم *** عمي القلب عن عيب الرفيق
ولا تأخذ بهفوة كل قوم *** ولكن قل: هلم إلى الطريق
متى تأخذ بهفوتهم تمل *** وتبقى في الزمان بلا صديق

*If you travel with a people and accompany them,
Then be to them like a close relative and brother
Who has insight and brings peace, criticizing only himself
With a heart blind to the errors of his companion*

¹¹⁰ Bahjat al-Majalis (3:313)

¹¹¹ Shadharat al-Dhahab

*Do not hold all people to account for their mistakes
But rather say: 'Come! Let us go on our way'
If you hold them for their mistakes, then you shall tire
And you shall remain in your life without any friends* ¹¹²

On the righteous ruler:

الله يدفع بالسلطان معضلة *** عن ديننا رحمة منه ورضوانا
لولا الأمة لم تأمن لنا سبل *** وكان أضعفنا نهبا لأقوانا

*It is with the Ruler that Allah prevents trouble
From afflicting our faith, out of His Mercy and Kindness
Were it not for the leaders, roads would not be safe for us
And the weak amongst us would be robbed by the strong* ¹¹³

His criticism of those who took to worshipping in Baghdad whilst the enemy was being fought on the frontlines:

أيها الناسك الذي لبس الصو *** ف وأضحى يعد في العباد
الزم الثغر والتعب فيه *** ليس بغداد مسكن الزهاد
إن بغداد للملوك محل *** ومناخ للقارئ الصياد

*O' you monk who has clothed himself in wool!
Who is now counted amongst the worshippers!
Adhere to the frontlines and worship therein
For Baghdad is not a place for the ascetic
Indeed Baghdad has become a place for the kings
And a residence only for the miserly recitor!* ¹¹⁴

فكيف قرت لأهل العلم أعينهم *** أو استلذوا لذيق النوم أو هجعوا
والنار ضاحية لا يد موردها *** وليس يدرون من ينجو ومن يقع
وطارت الصحف في الأيدي منشرة *** فيها السرائر والجبار مطلع
إم نعيم وعيش لا انقضاء له *** أو الجحيم فلا تبقي ولا تدع
تهوي بساكنها طورا وترفعه *** إذا رجوا مخرجا من غيها منعوا
لينفع العلم قبل الموت عالمه *** قد سال قوم بها الرجعى فما رجعوا

*How can the eyes of the people of knowledge find rest,
How can they find sweetness in their sleep and breaks
When Hellfire lies on the outskirts, they must pass over it
But they do not know, who will be saved and who will fall in?*

¹¹² Dhayl al-Jawahir al-Mudiyyah

¹¹³ Hilyat al-Awliya' (8/164)

¹¹⁴ Tarikh Baghdad. It is said that Ibn al-Mubarak said these lines of poetry to Abu al-'Itahiyyah who was a poet known for his asceticism. Ibn al-Mubarak saw him in Baghdad wearing garments of wool and when he asked who he was, the people said 'Abu al-'Itahiyyah' so he wrote these lines to him.

*The scrolls have been laid out and spread in their palms
In it lie all secrets, and the Compeller is watching
It is either great bliss and everlasting life
Or burning Hell where you'll remain and never be called
It suddenly seizes its dweller and raises him high
If they wish for a way out of its fierceness, they'll never be granted
So let knowledge benefit its scholar, before death approaches
For nations have asked to be returned, but they did not return* ¹¹⁵

الصمت أزين بالفتى *** من منطق في غير حينه
والصدق أجمل بالفتى *** في القول عندي من يمينه
وعلى الفتى بوقاره *** سمة تلوح على جبينه
فمن الذي يخفى علي *** ك إذا نظرت إلى قرينه
رب امرئ متيقن *** غلب الشقاء على يقينه
فأزاله عن رأيه *** فابتاع دنياه بدينه

*Silence is more beautiful for a youth
Than speech that's said outside of its occasion.
I find truthfulness to be more attractive for a youth
In his speech, more beautiful than even he himself.
Who is it that can remain hidden
If you were to look to his companions?
How often has a man who previously held certainty,
Become overwhelmed by misery, which overcame his conviction?
So it swayed him from his correct opinion
And so he purchased the world with his religion* ¹¹⁶

جربت نفسي فما وجدت لها * من بعد تقوى الإله كالادب
في كل حالاتها وإن كرهت * أفضل من صمتها عن الكذب
أو غيبة الناس إن غيبتهم * حرمتها ذو الجلال في الكتب
قلت لها طانعا وأكرهها * الحلم والعلم زين ذي الحسب
إن كان من فضة كلامك يا * نفس فإن السكوت من ذهب

*My soul has experienced much, but I did not find
After the taqwa of Allah, anything like good manners
And even if my soul dislikes it, I do not find
Anything better than abstaining from lies
Or backbiting the people, when it wished to backbite
For the Lord, Most Noble has prohibited that in the Revelation
I said to my soul, in obedience and struggle
'Forbearance and knowledge only beautify the noble
O' Soul! Surely, if your speech is silver
Then silence is made purely out of gold.'*

115 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'

116 See above source

ما لذتي إلا رواية مسند *** قد قيدت بفصاحة الألفاظ
ومجالس فيها علي سكينه *** ومذاكرات معاشر الحفاظ
نالوا الفضيلة والكرامة والنهي *** من ربهم برعاية الألفاظ
لاظوا برب العرش لما أيقنوا *** أن الجنان لعصبة لواظ

*'My pleasure lies only in transmitting narrations
Which have been perfected with eloquence of speech
And gatherings wherein tranquility descends
The gatherings of remembrance of the Huffadh
They have attained virtue, nobility and intellect
From their Lord, because they guarded narrations
They gained the Pleasure of the Lord of the Throne
When they gained certainty that for the righteous group
... Paradise lies in store*

اغتنم ركعتين زلفى إلى الله *** إذا كنت فارغاً مستريحاً
وإذا ما هممت بالنطق بالبأ *** ظل فاجعل طكانه تسبيحاً
فاغتنم السكوت أفضل من *** خوض وإن كنت بالكلام فصيحاً

*If you ever have time and find yourself in ease,
Then take advantage of prayer, to draw near to Allah
If you ever wish to speak ill a word of falsehood,
Then instead put in its place, a word of glorification
Because taking advantage of silence is better
Then speaking frequently, even if you are eloquent in speech*

Ibn al-Mubarak, the Pious Worshipper

As highlighted throughout this biography and indeed in any compilation which speaks about the life of Ibn al-Mubarak, it is clear that he was somebody who kept a close watch on his soul, his beliefs, his knowledge and his piety. Righteousness is not something that is guaranteed for everyone, but it is gained by the Mercy of Allah `azza wa jall through belief, worship and good deeds. Ibn al-Mubarak was an ardent and passionate worshipper who engaged in 'ibadah (worship) at every instance. He cultivated piety and righteousness in his soul and kept steadfast in that. This is testified to by many of his actions whether as a scholar, as a student or simply as a man from the community.

Despite ranking so high among his peers, this lofty status was never something that he displayed. He was known for his lengthy and regular prayers, his frequent recitation of Qur'an, and his humble and tender heart. He prolonged his stay in the mosque and kept himself to the worship of Allah `azza wa jall. 'Abdah ibn Sulayman said, 'When Ibn al-Mubarak prayed 'Asr, he would come to Masjid al-Massisah and face the Qiblah (Makkah) in remembrance of Allah. He wouldn't speak to anyone until the sun had set.'¹¹⁷ Nu'aym ibn Hammad said, 'I have never seen someone make more effort in 'Ibadah (worship) than him.'

¹¹⁸

'Ali ibn al-Hasan ibn Shaiq said, 'I never saw anyone who recited as much as Ibn al-Mubarak, or as beautifully as him, or pray as much as him. He used to pray the whole night regardless of whether he was travelling or not and he used to recite the Qur'an with eloquence and melody. Indeed, he would only leave his *Mahmal* (place of sleep for the traveller) so that he may pray, and the people never knew.'¹¹⁹

A man once said to him, 'I read the Qur'an in one raka'ah last night!' Ibn al-Mubarak said to him, '*But I know a man who spent last night repeating the chapter "Mutual rivalry diverts you (chapter 102)..." reciting it until dawn, unable to get past it (due to his deep contemplation over it).*'¹²⁰ – and here, he was referring to himself without stating so.

He loved to fast and pray by night and did so regularly, regardless of whether he was a resident or he was out of his home engaged in battles in the frontlines. Due to his regard of Allah `azza wa jall and his love of humbleness and hatred of riya' (showing off/pretentiousness), he kept his good deeds hidden.

It is narrated that Muhammad ibn A'yun (a companion of Ibn al-Mubarak) once travelled with him to partake in battle. He relates: 'On one particular night when we were out in Ghazawat al-Rum, he (Ibn al-Mubarak) went to lie down and pretended to sleep. I sat down clutching my spear and I rested my head on it also pretending to sleep.'

¹¹⁷ Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

¹¹⁸ Tadhkirat al-Huffadh

¹¹⁹ Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

¹²⁰ Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'

When he thought that I had fallen asleep, he got up and started to pray and he continued to do pray until dawn, whilst I continued to look on at him. When dawn arrived, he came to wake me up thinking that I was asleep. He said, '*O Muhammad...*' I said to him, 'I haven't slept.' When he heard that, he never spoke to me again and he did not offer me anything in his travels to battles. It was as if he disliked what I did of exposing his deeds, and this is something I noticed throughout his life until he died. I have never seen a man hide his good deeds as much as he did.' ¹²¹

This was something common throughout his life as mentioned previously and really, only Allah knows how much he used to do and how much has been written for him of good deeds because for sure, he kept them hidden from the people.

He also feared for himself and feared committing wrong against others.

In one instance, whilst in Sham (Greater Syria), he was writing down ahadith when his pen broke. He borrowed a pen from someone but when he finished writing, he forgot to give it back and hence he put it into his pen-holder. He then travelled and returned back to Marw (Central Asia, present day Turkmenistan) when he recognised the pen and realised that it was still with him! Without any hesitation, he immediately prepared himself for travel again in order to return the pen to its owner all the way in Sham.

Imam Ahmad said, 'Allah did not raise him (in honour) except due to fear that he had (of Allah). The lands of Khurasan have not brought out anyone like Ibn al-Mubarak.' ¹²²

Imam al-Awza'i once said about him, 'If you were to see him, your eyes would have found delight in him.' – And this is due to what appeared of his worship, good mannerism and conduct.

He was known to be '*Nasih al-Ummah*' (advisor of the Ummah), always enjoining good and forbidding evil when the occasion called for it – he wasn't one to discourage others from the *khayr* (good) nor was he one to shy away from correcting what he saw of *munkar* (wrong) in the land. He was known to have deep insight and care, hence his words always reflected that...

He was once asked, 'Who are the people (of virtue)?'

He said, '*The scholars.*'

'Then who are the kings?'

He said, '*The humble ascetic ones.*'

'Who are the loud, talkative ones (without any substance)?'

He said, '*Khuzaymah and his companions.*' (i.e. the oppressive rulers)

'Who are the foolish ones?'

He said, '*Those who consume and live off their religion.*' ¹²³

121 Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

122 Al-Wara' (pg. 73)

123 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

It is narrated that he also said, *'Those with deep insight never feel safe from four matters: A sin committed in the past which they don't know what Allah `azza wa jall has done with it; and a lifespan which remains to unfold, they don't know what lies in it of destruction; and a blessing given to the slave, which could perhaps be a curse and an allure or bait, and misguidance which has been beautified for a person such that he sees it as guidance; and a slip of the heart for a short moment wherein a person's religion is seized away and he does not feel it.'*¹²⁴

He was once asked about 'ujb (self-amazement) and he said, *'It is to perceive that you have something which no-one else besides you has. I don't know anything worse for the musallin (those who pray often) than 'ujb.'*¹²⁵

Those who accompanied him and were his friends, teachers and general folk often paid testimony to the fact that he was different and unique. His piety which he tried to keep hidden would often be expressed by events which took place in his life. Al-Hasan ibn 'Isa used to say that he (Ibn al-Mubarak) was *Mujab al-Da'wah* (someone whose supplications were always answered).¹²⁶ And this is the same al-Hasan ibn 'Isa who used to be a Christian. Ibn al-Mubarak supplicated for him saying, *'O Allah, grant him Islam.'* And so Allah answered his call and he entered into the fold of Islam.¹²⁷

Abi Wahb narrates that one day, Ibn al-Mubarak walked past a blind man who said to him, *'I ask you to supplicate Allah for me, to return my sight.'* So Ibn al-Mubarak supplicated to Allah and the man's sight was returned to him whilst I was looking!¹²⁸

Ibn al-Mubarak always paid particular attention to the state of his wealth, the purity of his charity and the income he brought home. He never allowed a single dirham to enter his possession if there was doubt over its permissibility. He once said, *'It is more beloved for me to cast away a single dirham which has been gained through shubhah (doubt) than for me to spend hundreds of thousands of dirhams in charity.'*¹²⁹ He also said, *'It is more beloved for me to spend one halal dirham in charity than spending sixty dirhams which have been gained in a doubtful manner.'*¹³⁰

In his mind, a truly pious person was one who avoided all doubtful matters and placed piety in every matter. He said, *'If a man stays away from a hundred things out of piety but didn't stay away from one single matter, then he is not from the pious & wary ones. And whoever has a small weight of ignorance in him, then he is counted amongst the ignorant ones. Have you not heard Allah Ta'ala saying saying to Nuh (alayhisalam) when he said, "... Indeed my son is from my family" So Allah said to him, "Indeed, I advice you, lest you be among the ignorant."* [Hud: 45-46]¹³¹

124 Siyar A'lam al-Nubala

125 See above source

126 Tahdhib al-Tahdhib

127 See above source

128 Tarikh Baghdad

129 Jami' 'Ulum wal-Hikam

130 Taqaddumat al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil

131 Hilyat al-Awliya'

Ibn al-Mubarak lived the verse wherein Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala said,

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

"Indeed, from the slaves of Allah, it is only those who possess knowledge that truly fear Him. Certainly, Allah is Exalted in Might, Most Forgiving."

[Al-Fatir: 28]

The fruits of his knowledge, deep insight and wisdom were clear in his life and displayed through his actions and words.

Some statements of wisdom by Ibn al-Mubarak:

'How often does a small deed become big due to one's intention, and how often does a big deed become small due one's intention!'

~

'When one of you learns enough of the Qur'an in order to pray, then let him occupy himself in seeking knowledge for that is the tool through which the meaning of the Qur'an is known.'

~

'If you people wish to backbite, then backbite your own parents so that your reward does not go out to a stranger, but rather to them!'

~

'How many people carry the Qur'an in their hearts but the Qur'an curses them from inside their hearts! If the bearer of Qur'an disobeys his Lord, the Qur'an calls him from inside his chest saying, 'By Allah, you have not carried me (i.e. memorised me) for this! Will you not be shy from your Lord?'

~

'Repentance from backbiting is to seek Allah's forgiveness for the one you have backbitten.'
Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah then said, 'Rather you should seek his forgiveness for what you've said.' Ibn al-Mubarak replied, *'No, you should not harm him twice.'*

~

'Those of you who have the most knowledge, should also be those who have the most fear (of Allah).'

~

'The inhabitants of this world have left the world without tasting the best thing in it.' He was asked, *'And what's the best of this world?'* He said, *'Knowing Allah `azza wa jall.'*

'When a person realises the scope of his own self and capabilities, he becomes more lowly to himself than a dog.'

~

He was asked, 'What's the best that a man has been given?' He said, 'Abundant

intelligence.' He was asked, 'And if not?' He said, 'Then good character.' It was said, 'And if not?' He said, 'A close friend who he can seek advice from.' It was said, 'And if not?' He said, 'Long periods of silence.' It was said, 'And if not?' He said, 'Then a quick death!'

~

'If a person bears patience, then indeed how little is the patience he needs to bear. And if a person is regretful and anxious, then how little is the enjoyment he indulges in.'

~

'There are four principles that I have derived from four thousand narrations: Do not attach yourself to a woman, do not be disillusioned by wealth, do not let your stomach carry more than it can bear and only learn from knowledge that which will benefit you.'

~

'Nothing has proven too difficult for me much as finding a brother/companion for the Sake of Allah.'

~

A Jewish neighbour of Ibn al-Mubarak decided to sell his house. He was asked 'How much?' He said, 'Two thousand.' They said to him, 'It's not worth one thousand!' He said, 'You're right. But I am taking one thousand for the house and one thousand for being the neighbour of Ibn al-Mubarak.' This was reported back to Ibn al-Mubarak who began supplicating for the man and he gave the money to him saying, 'Do not sell your house.'

~

Ibn al-Mubarak once went near a stream, he propped up his spear and tied his horse to it. Then he began to make wudhu (ablution) and pray. When he finished, he saw that his horse had begun eating the crop. He said, 'He has eaten of the impermissible, therefore it is not befitting to use him in battles!' – He then left the horse for the farmer and bought a new horse for the rest of his journey.

~

'Prepare for death and what's to come after death.'

~

'Mercy descends when the righteous are mentioned and remembered.'

~

'The Sultan of zuhd is greater than the Sultan of the people, because the Sultan of the people gathers them (and rules them) by the cane whereas the Sultan of zuhd flees from the people and they instead follow him.'

~

'There is nothing in this world for a person except one's daily portion of food.'

~

'If a person's goodness outweighs his errors, then his errors are not mentioned, and if his errors outweigh his goodness, then his goodness is not mentioned.'

~

A man once said to Ibn al-Mubarak: 'Is there anyone who will advice us?' He replied, 'Rather, is there anyone who will accept the advice?'

~

'This world is a prison for the believer and the best of deeds in prison is to have patience and to overcome one's anger. The believer has no country in this world, indeed his country lies in the Hereafter.'

~

A man said to him, 'Advice me.' So he said, 'Abandon looking at things for long periods of time and you shall be granted Khushu' (humbleness), abandon excessive speech and you shall be granted wisdom, abandon excessive food and you shall be guided to 'Ibadah (worship), abandon looking towards the faults of others and you shall be guided to seeing your own faults and abandon delving into the issues that concern the Being of Allah `azza wa jall, and you shall be guided away from doubts and hypocrisy.'

~

Another man once said to him, 'I see myself as being in a better state than someone who killed a person wrongfully.' He said to him, 'Indeed the security you feel for yourself (and have given yourself) is worse than a person who killed another wrongfully!'

~

'Indeed the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets, but if they fall into covetousness and greed, who shall be taken as leaders? The merchants and businessmen are the trustees of Allah, so if they are treacherous, who can be trusted? The warriors are the guests of Allah so if they become extreme (or take spoils without right), with whom can we defeat the enemies? The righteous and ascetic ones are the kings of the earth but if they become insincere (i.e. have riya'), who shall be followed? The governors/rulers are the shepherds (protectors) of the people, but if the shepherd becomes a wolf, who shall protect the flock?'

~

'Abdullah Ibn al-Mubarak: His Departure from this World

It is often said that a person will depart this world upon the deeds that he used to do and for Ibn al-Mubarak, that resonates particularly true. It was in the year 181 AH (797 CE), in the blessed month of Ramadan, in the early portions of the day just before dawn, that Allah `azza wa jall took the soul of Ibn al-Mubarak at the age of 63 - and in honour was his death because he passed away after having returned from battle.

Historical sources are unanimous in their record of this, and to this day, his grave and place of burial still lie in the land of Heet, near the Furat River in Baghdad, 'Iraq.

So there it was, in a glorious move of Decree for Ibn al-Mubarak that Allah `azza wa jall gathered up for him a life of goodness and drew it to an end in complete goodness for he died in the best of months, at the best of hours (الصبح - before dawn) after having engaged in the best of deeds.

It is mentioned that when death approached him, Ibn al-Mubarak said to Nasr, a bondsman of his: *'Place my head on the dust.'* Nasr began to weep so he said, *'Why are you crying?'* He said, *'I remember how you used to live in comfort but today you die in poverty and as a stranger.'* Ibn al-Mubarak said to him, *'Don't say that, for truly I asked Allah the Most High to let me live the life of the rich and to let me die the death of the poor. Keep commanding me to say the testimony of faith (Shahadah), but do not push me so long as I don't say anything else after it.'*¹³²

And so he passed away in a humble state after having lived such an enriched, fulfilling and beneficial life. He left behind no wealth for people to inherit, but he left behind what was more precious than that - knowledge as deep as oceans and an example for all to follow. He was the advisor to this Ummah, an ardent follower and protector of the Prophetic Sunnah and a warrior defending the weak.

Thus his death brought tears to the eyes of all the people around the Muslim world, from leaders to the general population, from scholars to laymen, from those in the far east to those in the far west, from those who lived and accompanied him to those who only heard of him and his deeds. When news of his death reached the 'Abbasi ruler Harun al-Rashid, he said, **'Today, the leader of the scholars has passed away.'**¹³³

Ibn Hibban, the Imam of Jarh and Ta'dil (critique of narrators) made the weighty statement, *'He had gathered characteristics which were never before gathered in any scholar in his time in the entire world.'*

Fudhayl ibn 'Iyadh, his long-time friend and companion said, *'By the Lord of this House, my eyes have never seen the likes of Ibn al-Mubarak. May Allah have mercy on him, none have come after him who are in any way like him.'*

¹³² Ihya 'Ulum al-Din

¹³³ Tarikh Baghdad

Imam al-Dhahabi said, *'By Allah, I love him for the Sake of Allah and wish for goodness through it due to what Allah has blessed him with of piety, of worship, of sincerity, of Jihad and of abundant knowledge, proficiency, balance and praiseworthy attributes.'*¹³⁴

Al-Faryabi said, 'I saw the Prophet (sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam) in a dream and I said to him, 'What is Ibn al-Mubarak doing?' He said, *'He is with those whom Allah has favoured, from the Prophets, the Truthful, the Martyrs and the Righteous, and how excellent are those as companions.'*¹³⁵

May Allah have mercy on Ibn al-Mubarak, the Faqih of this Ummah, the scholar of the East and the scholar of the West.

134 Tadhkirat al-Huffadh

135 Tarikh Baghdad